


Artists of Abraham Lincoln portraits

Alexander R. James

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

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November 27, 1971

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12/2/71

Editor McMurtry,
"Lincoln Lore,"
Fort Wayne, Ind.

Dear sir,

Librarian Wheeler of Westfield, N. Y., suggests we contact you, with all your wonderful Lincolniانا. in my search for the origin of Grace Bedell, the girl who put a beard on Abe.

We have an idea her parents or grandparents hailed from N. H., for we had some Revolutionary Bedells, including the topman of them all, Moody Bedell, who had a leading role, with 3 wives and 19 kids, in founding the celebrated Indian Stream Republic, in north N. H., in 1832-36.

Have you any info in this area?

We put Lincoln's portrait in our State House in 1926, with school children's pennies financing the \$3,500 project. Gov. John Gilbert Winant, who looked like and worshipped Lincoln and his life and political ways, sponsored it, but the artist refused to use his body for it. So now Lincoln hangs, bigger than life, in our Representatives' Hall, with Washington, Pierce, Webster and Sen. Hale, the first (1845) anti-slavery senator in Washington.

Thought the enclosed might interest you.

Sincerely,

Andy Anderson
Leon W. Anderson,
Legislative Historian,
State House,
Concord, N. H. *03801*

(artist)

James, Alexander B.
(Lincoln portrait in
N. H. State House)

The 1921 General Court initiated the Lincoln painting with a resolution stating "It seems appropriate that our state should be in line with other states in recognizing the services of one of the greatest men the world ever produced, and place beside the portrait of Washington, our first President, an appropriate oil painting of Abraham Lincoln, our sixteenth President."

Rep. James H. Hunt of Nashua ^{sponsored} ~~first proposed~~ the resolution. Rep. Elmer E. Woodbury of Woodstock, a state forestry employee, led in ^{guiding} ~~pushing~~ the measure through the House.

Penny-pinching as usual (while frequently free with large spendings), the legislators voted a three-man committee to beg (solicit) funds for the homage to Lincoln from the cities and towns. Woodbury was appointed to the committee, along with Rep. Joseph B. Murdock of Hill, a retired Rear Admiral, and Sen. John G. Winant of Concord, a flying Captain of World War 1, who became chairman.

Woodbury became the committee chairman and reported the project's progress in the December 1923 Granite Monthly. He said school children, asked to finance the portrait rather than the political subdivisions of the state, had contributed \$3,000, ten thousand strong, mostly in patriotic pennies. Woodbury also said Manchester's Frank French had been hired to paint it for unveiling on February 12, 1925, Lincoln's natal anniversary.

French was thrilled. He commented that not only had he always revered Lincoln, but was inspired by the famed Lincoln sculpture by his cousin, Daniel Chester French, and the war records of his two older brothers in the rebellion.

A half-size sketch having been approved by Winant and his associates, French negotiated with Frank McGlynn, an actor then famous for his portrayal of the martyred President in the Drinkwater play, "Abraham Lincoln," to pose for a full-length painting. McGlynn agreed and then the Frenchs left for a customary wintering in California, having all of 1924 in which to paint Lincoln for the 1925 unveiling.

Upon his return in the spring of 1925, French learned to his dismay of an apparent change in plans. Rumors that Winant, by then a candidate for Governor, favored another artist for the project, eventually became fact.

After first becoming Governor in January of 1925, Winant disclosed purchase of a noted Lincoln portrait by William Morris Hunt from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, for use to produce a Lincoln for the State House.

In March Alexander R. James, a noted Boston artist then settled in Dublin, was retained by Winant for the project. Hunt's Lincoln was dispatched to Dublin in Winant's private automobile (guarded by detectives, according to Mrs. James' diary), and James completed the new Lincoln and delivered it at Concord by April 14. Fourteen days later, James went to Concord to retouch a Lincoln head to please Governor Winant, and then left for a summer tour of Europe.

Mrs. James recalled to this writer that her late husband never received a final \$500 payment of a \$2,000 fee for his Lincoln. But she explained "he hated to fuss about money" and never asked for it.

James was only 34 when he produced the Lincoln likeness which hangs serenely between Washington and Pierce in Representatives' Hall, while French then was a declining 75. He had earlier made an original of Governor Robert P. Bass of Peterborough for the State House, which possibly influenced the Winant shift from French.

French's artistry was self-developed. Born Franklin Pierce French in Loudon in 1850 (his birth was never recorded), he shortened his name upon entering grade school, as President Pierce's public lustre tarnished in retirement. Youngest of ten, whose parents died when he was a child, French was encouraged in painting by a sister, Clara. As a youth he decorated interiors of railroad cars at the Laconia Car Shops, and at twenty became an illustrator for the "Mirror and Farmer" newspaper at Manchester. There his wood engravings so excelled that Publisher John B. Clarke arranged more lucrative employment at New York City. It was only after engraving became mechanized that French turned to portraiture, which won him medals at four ~~and~~ world expositions.

When Lincoln was put up, President Pierce was relegated to the extreme left panel of the front wall in Representatives' Hall, to make room for the Saviour of the Union. Pierce landed in the niche once occupied by the three Wentworths who governed New Hampshire through much of the colonial years. They were Lieutenant Governor John Wentworth (1717-30), his son, Governor Benning Wentworth (1741-67), and a grandson, Governor John Wentworth (1767-75).

The three Wentworths were crowded into the left panel in 1784, gifts of a descendant, Mark ^kHuning [^]Wentworth of Portsmouth. Two were full length and the first Wentworth was in bust size. After the 1910 State House enlargement, the first Wentworth went into a corridor, with all the other portraits in the grand chamber, except for Washington, Pierce, Webster, Hale and the two other Wentworths, adorning the five panels of the front wall.

When Lincoln was hung, Benning was moved outside a legislative door and the final Wentworth was moved to the southeast corner of the chamber. Then ~~the portrait was~~ a dozen years ago when a fire escape stairway was built in that corner up to the gallery, this Wentworth went into a storage bin.

James, New York

Artist's-J

